

VA Puget Sound NEWS

*Proudly Serving
Veterans of the
Northwest*



VA Puget Sound Health Care System • American Lake & Seattle

Autumn 1998

Teamwork Leads Reorganization Effort

In February 1998, the Implementation Task Force (ITF) was formed to finalize the process of reorganization. Reassignment of many employees within the new structure has been formalized. The administrative requirements of changing timekeeping units, position descriptions, performance standards, budget groups, and allocations for FY 99 have been achieved.

Currently, the ITF is focusing attention on the design, upgrade, and maintenance of our communication systems. Our telephone directory, computer networks, and mail stops are being revised to ensure that these important linkages remain intact.

A number of reasons encouraged us to reorganize, not the least of which was improving access to our health care system. The existing structure had become functionally cumbersome for 40 different services. The new organization has been streamlined into 12 integrated service lines. Our goal is to reduce duplication of effort and allow patient care teams to function more efficiently.

From the beginning, employees have been active participants in the process, asking questions and suggesting solutions that have helped determine the impact of implementation on the organization and individuals. Initial feedback from staff surveys has been positive, and we are hopeful that a repeat survey will show continued progress and greater acceptance.

We have made VA Puget Sound a better place to work and a better place to care for our valued constituents. Many thanks go out to a committed, creative, and hard working Implementation Task Force. ♡

Executive Board Moves Forward

The twenty-two member Executive Board has begun its regular meetings. This cooperative team represents our leadership and the constituents we serve. They provide our strategic guidance, and support and foster patient-focused quality care, and oversight for aligning health care, education and research resources and goals. Their responsibilities include the discussion and analysis of the role and positioning of VA Puget Sound in VISN 20; developing a strategy for a 6% increase in workload for FY1999; assessing budget issues; and the VA's funding model. The Executive Board is also exploring patient care issues such as methods to reduce access times for clinic appointments and the number of outpatient "No Shows." In the coming months, the Board will begin to look at JCAHO readiness, our strategic plan, and performance measures. ♡

Comments from the Director

***Commitment and Team Focus
Enable Us to Achieve Great
Things***

Over the past two years, VA Puget Sound Health Care System has accomplished some remarkable things. We believed that we could achieve more if we worked collaboratively.



We have evolved from two separate and distinct facilities into one fully-integrated health care system. We now share and discuss common goals, values, and objectives based on a new vision for our organization.

Our future success is dependent on the level of honesty, trust, and confidence that we personally demonstrate on a daily basis as part of a collective effort. This success translates into such things as high patient/customer satisfaction, increased problem-solving, and national recognition of our efforts.

This year we have been recognized with two Presidential Hammer Awards as part of the President's National Performance Review. Additionally, we are the only entire facility in the VA health care system to receive a Customer Service Award, as part of Undersecretary of Health, Dr. Kenneth Kizer's effort to improve services to veterans.

Earlier this year, the Spinal Cord Injury Program was awarded

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New Center Enhances Primary and Preventive Care

American Lake showcased its beautifully designed Ambulatory Care Center with a formal debut on August 21, 1998. Staff, patients and their families as well as staff from our congressional delegation and representatives from veterans service organizations joined other local dignitaries as they filled the outdoor canopy beneath the evergreens for a special dedication ceremony. Timothy Williams, CEO, and Dr. Tesfai Gabre-Kidan, Associate Chief, Primary Care cut the red ribbon to officially open the center.

Over the past several years, the number of veterans seeking care at VA Puget Sound Health Care System has increased, growing from about 40,000 in 1995 to nearly 44,000 in 1997. This increased demand has created a need to remodel and expand ambulatory care facilities in order to continue providing excellent, state-of-the-art health care to veterans. As we continue to meet this growing and changing need, settings like Building 81 will enhance our ability to provide care that exceeds our customer expectations.

Designed with a contemporary and airy feel, the clinic boasts 13,000 square feet of new space adjacent to the main medical building. The clinic layout also incorporates 4500 square feet of existing space, adds 26 new exam rooms, and:

- Creates a new main entrance with a convenient patient drop-off and pick-up area
- Simplifies the admitting process for new patients and increases patient privacy
- Moves clinical support functions such as social workers, dietitians, and pharmacists closer to the clinics
- Provides each primary care team its own waiting space, exam rooms, treatment room

- Provides a separate and private Women's Health Care Center with its own waiting space and exam rooms
- Improves the functional layout, permitting easier access among care teams and more direct access to the Emergency Room and hospital



(l-r) Gail Eck, Timothy Williams, Dee Daugherty RN, and Gabre-Kidan, MD cut ribbon

A year of planning went into the design of the clinic with service to patients as the top priority. Care teams are excited about the setting in which they will work. These teams were designed to comprise physicians, nurses, physician assistants, dietitians, social workers and other specialists. A fourth clinical team dedicated to surgery is located nearby.

One of the goals is to enable patients to reach their providers in the least amount of time. Care teams will be directly involved in the ongoing education, care and follow-up of their patients.

Those who have toured the clinic are pleased to have such a beautiful facility join the other clinics and programs that comprise the American Lake and Seattle campuses. ♡

Mission
Vision
Values

Top Honors in Customer Service

VA Puget Sound Health Care System has been presented the prestigious Under Secretary for Health's Superior Customer Service Award.

This award recognizes the nation's best providers of customer service and excellence in four areas: customer feedback surveys; timeliness and access; process and system improvements; and tangible benefits. We are the only entire facility in the VA system to be recognized by such an award.

We are very proud of this honor. Continuous enhancements in customer service is one of VA's critical missions. ♡

Hammer – Times Two!

Hammer Awards were developed by Vice President Albert Gore when the federal government was being lambasted for paying several hundred dollars for a simple hammer. The incident inspired the creation of the President's National Performance Review, a government recognition program whose emphasis was to put customers first, cut red tape, empower employees, and get back to basics. VA Puget Sound and VA Regional Benefits office together won two such awards this year!

The first recognizes a streamlined approach to processing claims for active duty personnel prior to military discharge. This process enables soon-to-be veterans to obtain a VA rating before leaving the military.

A second award acknowledges a two-way, high-speed computer link that now allows VA Regional Benefits office instant access to clinical information to adjudicate ratings. Likewise, VA Puget Sound is able to obtain immediate data from the Regional Office's database.

Congratulations to those of you who made these projects happen! ♡

People In The News

Amputee Soccer Player from VA Puget Sound Seeks World Cup

Are you fit enough to compete in an international soccer match? Steve Wilbur, a veteran and VA Puget Sound employee is. He has just returned from a 10 day trip to Manchester, England, where he participated in the World Cup Amputee Soccer games as a member of the U.S. team. Six other teams (three from Russia, one each from England, Brazil, and the United States) participated in the meet. His travel costs were augmented by a grant from VA Puget Sound Employees Association.

Steve did not become active in sports until he moved to the Puget Sound area in 1984. In 1972, Steve underwent a below-the-knee amputation of his left leg as a result of a motorcycle-car accident. He first learned to ski on one leg and then gravitated to soccer during the summer to maintain his physical conditioning. Steve is a regularly featured speaker to nursing classes, new and soon-to-be amputees, and area schools.



Steve, number 17, is pictured with his team in England

Amputee soccer was born in the Puget Sound area almost 20 years ago and will be celebrated in the year 2000 when the World Cup Amputee Soccer games are hosted here. According to Steve, "each year is more and more physically challenging," but his love of the sport remains undiminished. Congratulations Steve! ♡



(l-r) Paul Severson, Charles Smith, MD, JJ Conavad and Al Buster.

DAV Customer Service

It takes a "team" to heal a patient — a team of compassionate, skilled clinicians, administrative personnel, and some 1,300 volunteers like those at VA Puget Sound.

One unique program is the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Transportation Network. Spearheading the Seattle Division program is Washington State's DAV Hospital Service Coordinator, Paul Severson, and his wife, Jeanette. On August 15th, Charles Smith, MD, Chief Medical Officer, accepted the keys to two new DAV vans plus a generous donation from veteran John Badovinac toward the purchase of another new van!

More than 7200 veterans received transportation in the past year! We deeply appreciate the efforts of the 38 volunteers who drive the fleet of 10 vans. ♡

CEO Receives Presidential Award



We're very proud of our CEO

Timothy B. Williams, CEO, traveled to Washington DC in June of this year to receive a special Meritorious Executive Presidential Rank Award presented by the Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs. This prestigious award acknowledges Mr. Williams' exceptional performance, leadership, and integrity combined with his professional service and accomplishments on behalf of a federal government agency. ♡

Breakthroughs In Medicine

VA Puget Sound Hosts National Research Conference

VA Puget Sound hosted Jack Feussner, MD, MPH, VA's Chief Research and Development (R&D) Officer, for the National Association of Veterans Research & Education Foundations (NAVREF) Board Meeting in August. NAVREF serves VA and its affiliated nonprofit corporations as an educational and liaison service. It also educates legislators regarding the importance of the research mission of the Dept. of Veterans Affairs. As the Chief R&D Officer, Dr. Feussner oversees the four major research and development programs: Biomedical Research, Rehabilitation R&D, Health Services R&D, and Cooperative [Clinical] Studies.

Dr. Feussner shared information on the revamping of the Career Development and Career Scientist Programs. New programs include the Medical Research Entry Program (a mentor program for new faculty) and the Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP) that provides core funding for groups of investigators working in the same area.



Jack Feussner, MD

VA Puget Sound currently has two programs pending review, one in Cancer and one in Dementia. We recently received \$1.9 million for new equipment in Biomedicine, Health Services,

Rehabilitation and Epidemiology programs. Nationally, the percentage of applications approved for funding has nearly doubled over the last two years. This growth was achieved within a national Department of Veterans Affairs R&D budget that has remained essentially unchanged for the past several years.

The funding picture for FY 99 looks good, with the President's recommended budget at \$300 million for Department of Veterans Affairs R&D, the House and Senate both recommending slightly more. An additional \$25M for joint VA/Department of Defense projects has been proposed for FY 99. ♡

Paralyzed Veterans of America Gift Makes a Difference

Thanks to the generosity of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) unit recently developed an assistive technology/computer laboratory for evaluating and training our veterans in computer access and use of the Internet. The laboratory is equipped with state-of-the-art voice-recognition software and patient education materials.

In attempting to make the laboratory universally accessible, the Northwest and Oregon Chapters of PVA made a generous donation to our clinic, donating over \$2500 to purchase needed computer access equipment. With these funds, the SCI unit has purchased a Head-mouse, a wireless, Sip-n-Puff Switch (WISP), and Screen-doors software.

Well Deserved Congratulations On CARF Award

VA Puget Sound's Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) program has recently been awarded a three-year accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). This important award represents the highest level of accreditation possible.

Spinal Cord Injury Program was awarded accreditation in two areas: Comprehensive Inpatient Category Two Hospital, and Spinal Cord Rehabilitation System of Care. As the only SCI Center in VA to achieve this accreditation, we again have gained national attention for our level of excellence!

SCI is recognized for delivering high-quality rehabilitation services to veterans with spinal cord injury throughout the Northwest. SCI leadership and staff are congratulated for this achievement. ♡

The Head-mouse and WISP allow hands-free access to the computer, utilizing an infrared light reflecting off a decal placed on the patient's forehead. The WISP is a sip-n-puff switch attached to a headset that allows the individual to perform standard mouse functions.

This needed and important adaptive equipment will increase independence, improve job readiness skills, and make our veterans more competitive to pursue employment. Further, it will provide them communication tools and universal access to the World Wide Web. Thank you PVA for making a difference in the lives of many. ♡

Veterans

Our

family,

Our friends.

Service To One Who Served Us Well

He was born into an upscale Seattle family in 1906 and passed away in June, a resident of the Alzheimer's Unit at American Lake. During the intervening 92 years, Webb Ware Trimble left his mark of gentility, goodwill, and public service whether at the boarding schools he attended as a young boy, as a student at Yale University, as an officer in the US Army, or as a civil servant.

In the 1890s, his parents left the crippled post-Civil War climate of Kentucky for the bustling frontier economy of Seattle where their family wealth immediately secured them substantial real estate and a place in Seattle society. Webb was the youngest of five. Like his siblings, he was sent off to boarding school in the East. It was there that he was first recognized with an award for "the most kind and considerate." It was also there, to combat homesickness, that he and his schoolmates adopted mice as their pets, dressing them up in costumes. Years later as an Army officer on the islands of Leyte and Okinawa, he and his fellow soldiers made pets of spider monkeys. He named his pair Mickey and Marjorie.

The Depression destroyed the family fortune. Webb Trimble, however, continued the family legacy of service



to others. He was active in the 96th Division, the Yale Club, and the League of American Wheelmen (a bicycle club dedicated to creating bicycling trails) as well as a member of the English-speaking Union. Both he and Elizabeth, his wife of 51 years, were tireless volunteers.


Throughout his life, Trimble was known for his compassion, positive attitude, and proper manners. A later onset of dementia, ultimately forced him into sheltered care. While the family had several options available to them, they ultimately chose the Alzheimer's Unit on 2C North at the American Lake for his care.

Everything about the Alzheimer's Unit was exemplary, from the homey comforts of the ward to the food – tasty and beautifully served. There Trimble received the "most wonderful care we could have ever hoped for," according to his daughter Cassandra. She went on to say that the most important element of her father's care was the steadfast devotion of his 2C North caregivers. In his last days, his 10 year old Cairn Terrier, Phoebe, was allowed unlimited visitation. Current and retired staff members and their families attended his memorial service at the American Lake Chapel – Webb Trimble touched many lives. 

*American Lake staff
supremely served a
man who was of
service to others.*


Comments *(continued from page 1)*

recognition as a Center of Excellence. Many of our units, programs, and services continue to receive special acknowledgment and national visibility for their unique programs and services. These major achievements point to our deep commitment to continuous quality improvement, our collective belief in our mission, and our strong sense that teamwork enables us to accomplish more than we can achieve individually.

The level of professionalism, integrity and dedication we bring to our jobs on a daily basis is noticed and appreciated by our colleagues, by our patients, and by the many veterans organizations who help support our efforts in the community. We have a great deal to be proud of and a lot to look forward to. Thank you for all you do. 

Joint Commission Just Around The Corner


A team of your colleagues, the JETT2 (Joint Education Training Team), has been working on innovative ways to help us all become active participants in the upcoming JCAHO survey in March 1999. One of their projects has been the bookmarks that accompany pay slips. These bookmarks highlight information that all employees are responsible for knowing.

Look for more tips from JETT2 in the months ahead and remember, save your bookmarks to be eligible for prizes later on. Be an informed member of VA Puget Sound's team. 


Youth Volunteers

This year's youth volunteer theme, "Volunteering for Our Nation's Heroes," captured the commitment of 84 young men and women, ages 14 to 18. They have served more than 7,000 hours at both divisions during the summer.


Thanks go to the AFGE Union Local #498 and ALVA Federal Credit Union who each donated a \$100 savings bond. The bond for the 1998 "Most Inspirational" youth volunteer was presented to Jason Johnson, a 16 year old Steilacoom High School student, who served 450 hours with the Canteen Service. April Cross, a 15 year old from Clover Park High School, was awarded the "Most Outstanding Youth Volunteer" award and bond. April served 550 hours in Psychiatry and Ambulatory Care.

Patients, family and friends joined in both division celebrations where the volunteers received colorful VA logo T-shirts as a thank you. 

Enrollment Awareness Program

The VA recently launched the national enrollment awareness program. Soon you will see television announcements, posters, and additional brochures talking about enrollment eligibility. John Park, Don Becker, John Beckham, and Judy Sommers along with a team of your colleagues have been working to ensure that you have the information necessary to assist veterans in understanding the purpose of enrollment. Watch for more updates. Remember — no one is going to lose benefits, and veterans can register after October 1st, 1998. 

CBOC Launched with PacMed

We have just launched our first CBOC (Community Based Outpatient Care) Program in North King and South Snohomish Counties in partnership with PacMed. Veterans living within the North Sound area will receive announcements inviting their involvement in this new outpatient primary and preventive care program. Molly Aldassy, RN, is managing this program; patients may expect to begin receiving care October 1. 

VA Puget Sound NEWS

VA Puget Sound News is published quarterly, each autumn, winter, spring and summer by the Office of Public Affairs. VA Puget Sound Health Care System proudly serves veterans throughout the Northwest with facilities located in Seattle and at American Lake. VA Puget Sound is part of the VISN 20 network of health care facilities.



VA PUGET SOUND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

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